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INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

THOUGH an opinion may prevail, that it is too late in life for a man of my years to undertake a task of such great extent and labour, as this, which I am now engaged in, I will persuade myself, that, having in so many ways, and on so many occasions, manifested a sincere and ardent zeal for the literary character of the age I live in, my persevering efforts will be still received with candour and indulgence.

Let my Readers give me credit for the purity, (I had almost said the patriotism) of my intentions, and let me see this spirited and praiseworthy undertaking once fairly set on foot, and then, whether it shall be disability or death, that takes the conduct of it out of my hands, and places it in those that are more able, I shall still have done some service to my contemporaries, and none but the kind friends, who love me, will consider it as a loss, when I am no more heard of.

If therefore, according to the opinion above stated, I have presumptuously undertaken a work above my strength, it will soon be found out; but predictions at random do not discourage me; if they study to alarm, they miss their aim: such *auguries I defy.*

I do not seek to evade inquiry: I claim only to be

heard before I am condemned; and that is my unalienable right. It is by no means my disposition to censure indiscriminately a whole body of gentlemen, concerned in the like labours with my own, merely because they carry on their operations under casemates or by ambuscade, whilst I work in the open field; yet I am free to own I should like to see their faces, that I might have a better chance for understanding their manœuvres: When the enemy veiled himself in a cloud, honest Ajax only prayed for light.

The man, who in the genuine spirit of criticism impartially distributes praise or blame to the works he reviews, has no more need to hide his name than the tradesman has, who records himself over his shop-door; for whom has he to fear, or of what to be ashamed? Learning has no truer friend; Genius no better counsellor, no safer guide.

Every one must confess, that there is a dangerous temptation, an unmanly security, an unfair advantage in concealment: Why then should any man, who seeks not to injure but to benefit his contemporaries, resort to it? There can be no reason why he should do that with the best intentions, which evil men are fain to do for the worst of purposes. A piece of crape may be a convenient mask for a highwayman; but a man, that goes upon an honest errand, does not want it and will disdain to wear it.

In my own particular (thank Heaven!) I have no quarrel to adjust with any man, whom I can name, or whom I cannot name. On the contrary I am much

beholden to many of my brother critics from behind the curtain, who have robbed me of nothing but the satisfaction I should else have had in acknowledging their favours, and returning them my thanks. At the same time I will not deny, that I had been better pleased if Mrs. *Inchbald*, for instance, would not have taken from me (what she does not want for herself) the credit of originality as the author of *The Wheel of Fortune*. I must think it was not a very lady-like action in her to exercise her dexterity upon the pocket of the poor. But she has set me on the watch to save others, if I can, from the like depredation, and profiting by a lesson, conveyed to me by her fair hand—

——*Miseris succurrere disco.*

I have never been able clearly to comprehend why some men take such pains to under-rate the talents of their contemporaries. If it is because they have a pleasure in keeping company with dull fellows, they certainly may enjoy that pleasure without stint; but they won't gain much credit by their taste. If they aim to raise themselves by sinking others, there is a marvellous great bathos in their ambition. But what is it they wish to do? Is it to make men brighter that they persuade them they are blockheads; or do they aspire to erect a throne for themselves upon the ruins of genius, and be approached, like black barbarians, through an avenue of sculls exhibited upon poles as the trophies of

their cruelty? It has been said (but it was a saying fathered upon the devil)—

Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.

They are welcome to the sentiment, but I hope they won't make the choice.

There are others, who in terms more civil, but not less insidious, labour to cry down times present by crying up times past. But what can dead men do for them, except *tell no tales* of the ill treatment they received when living! Alas! there is no eloquence, no wit, no wisdom in the grave—

Expende Hannibalem!—

The dust of the hero is in nothing better than the dust of any other body. It is upon the living only we can build our hopes of an enlightened age. They may be animated by our praise; they may be ameliorated by our counsel and correction: they are worthy all our care. Let Criticism throw off her malignity, and clothe herself in candour, then shall she be a fit nurse for the children of the British muse, in whose illustrious family there is no symptom of decay. I could name some whose meditations are sublime, whose early efforts I have contemplated with admiration, and whose display, when it shall be matured, augurs an æra, which, though I may never live to see it, yet I am bold to promise no past period will eclipse.

Is not every man interested in the honour of the

nation he belongs to? Let me then wonder at the bad policy of those, that waste their pains in watering a dead plant, from which they can expect no produce, and neglect a living one, which bursting into bloom, if duly fostered, may delight them with its beauty, and regale them with its odour.

Literature is of no party; the critic therefore should not let his politics appear: He should preserve the manners and language of a gentleman in his dealings with his contemporaries, for they are likely to be his only customers; his wares are by no means manufactured for posterity.

Almost every man, who writes to the passions, or appeals to the opinions of his readers, sets out with a profession of impartiality. But does he keep his word? How many are correctly impartial? Very few indeed. I take for granted therefore it is extremely difficult. I will do my utmost to contend with that difficulty, but I will not make any vaunting promises, that I shall completely overcome it.

How any man, in reviewing the political opinions of another, can so conduct himelf as not to give some intimation of his own way of thinking, is not easy to foresee: And if the Reader's patience serves him to peruse my observations upon Mr. Fox's volume, I doubt not but his sagacity will discover some leaning towards opinions, which long experience of eventful times, and my conscience, have impressed upon me.

A very few words more, with the Reader's favour, for myself, and in truth on such a subject they cannot

be too few—Approved of by my associates as the conductor of a work, that professes the defence of genius, I trust that I possess a spirit, which neither public wrongs nor private sufferings have been able to subdue; and, though with one foot in the grave, I will do my duty and maintain my post to the last.

We have now completed the first Number of our Review, and respectfully present it to the judgment of the public with the usual salvo—*errors excepted.* I trust I need not urge our claim to candour, for every body knows the pain and peril of a first approach. Our pledged associates are aware of that, and wisely post themselves in the reserve. There is a motherly kind of virtue, called discretion, which knows that danger is not good for us, and kindly warns us to avoid it: To that maternal warning we are well disposed to lend an ear. The wary and sagacious will not be eager to push off in the first adventurous boat, till they have proof that she is sea-worthy: If she lands us safe, they will embark with confidence, and we shall then show all our strength. In the mean time my best thanks are due to such of my associates, as have volunteered with me to share the risk of an experiment, to which we are allured by nothing but our zeal to serve a cause, wherein they, who look on, have equal interest with us, who labour.

RICHARD CUMBERLAND.